

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-12 IO-14 ISO-00 OES-07 HEW-06
SMI-01 NSF-02 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 ICA-20
PA-02 DODE-00 NEAE-00 TRSE-00 CTME-00 /101 W
-----126218 261602Z /43

P R 261229Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1841
INFO USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY BONN

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 8312

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: TBIO TPHY IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN MONKEY EXPORT BAN

1. INDIAN WIRE SERVICE UNI IS CARRYING AN EXTENSIVE AND FOR THE
MOST PART WELL-INFORMED ARTICLE ON THE BACKGROUND OF THE MONKEY
EXPORT BAN AND EFFORTS TO REVERSE IT. US CONCERN OVER THE BAN IS
A PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE. TEXT FOLLOWS:

BEGIN TEXT

2. NEW DELHI, MAY 26 (UNI) BAN ON THE EXPORT OF MONKEYS BY
THE UNION GOVERNMENT EARLY THIS YEAR HAS NOW BECOME A BONE OF
CONTENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA, IT IS LEARNED.
THE BAN HAS HIT A LARGE NUMBER OF MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR DRUG
FIRMS IN THE UNITED STATES, BRITAIN AND SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.
THIS IS BECAUSE INDIA IS THE MAIN SOURCE OF RHESUS MONKEYS
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FOR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH IN THESE COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY FOR THE
PRODUCTION OF POLIO VACCINES. OTHER TYPES OF MONKEYS, THOUGH
AVAILABLE IN COUNTRIES LIKE AFRICA, ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR THIS TYPE
OF RESEARCH AND HENCE MOST OF THE COUNTRIES HAD BEEN DEPENDING
ON INDIA FOR SUPPLY OF RHESUS MONKEYS. INDIA'S DECISION TO BAN
EXPORTS OF MONKEYS WAS TAKEN BY PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI
HIMSELF ON THE BASIS OF REPRESENTATIONS FROM SOME AMERICAN

ANIMAL-LOVERS THAT MONKEYS FROM INDIA WERE BEING USED BY THE UNITED STATES TO STUDY THE EFFECT OF RADIATION IN NEUTRON BOMBS.

3. THE INFORMATION THAT THE UNITED STATES DEFENCE DEPARTMENT WAS USING RHESUS MONKEYS FOR RADIATION EXPERIMENTS WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE AMERICAN MEDIA ITSELF. MANY AMERICAN ECOLOGICAL GROUPS PROTESTED TO THE US GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE INHUMAN TREATMENT METED OUT TO MONKEYS BY SUBJECTING THEM TO THE TORTURE OF RADIATION SICKNESS TO FURTHER THE INTERESTS OF AMERICAN WEAPONS PROGRAM. THIS WAS BROUGHT TO THE NOTICE OF THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER. IN 1977, INDIA HAD EXPORTED ABOUT 20,000 RHESUS MONKEYS, MOST OF WHICH WENT TO THE UNITED STATES.

MUCH BEFORE THE BAN WAS IMPOSED, THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT WAS SHOWING KEEN INTEREST IN ASSISTING INDIA DEVELOP ITS MONKEY POPULATION.

4. THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES, OFFERED TO FINANCE A BIG PROJECT TO SCREEN MONKEYS FOR DETECTION OF DISEASES BEFORE EXPORT. THE UNION GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, TURNED DOWN THE SUGGESTION, SPECIALLY ON THE ADVICE OF THE INDIAN COUNCIL OF MEDICAL RESEARCH. ICMR WAS ASKED TO SUGGEST THE QUOTA OF MONKEYS INDIA COULD SAFELY EXPORT WITHOUT ENDANGERING THE RHESUS MONKEYS. ICMR TOLD THE GOVERNMENT THAT INDIA DID

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NOT HAVE ENOUGH DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF MONKEYS AND IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO ALLOW ANY EXPORTS TILL A COUNTRY-WIDE SURVEY OF MONKEYS WAS UNDERTAKEN. ICMR'S RECOMMENDATION FOLLOWED SOME REPORTS THAT CERTAIN TYPES OF MONKEYS MAY BE ON THEIR WAY TO EXTINCTION.

5. THE SUGGESTION FOR A SURVEY OF MONKEYS WAS ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT. THE JOB WAS ENTRUSTED TO THE ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT WANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY AND MADE VARIOUS SUGGESTIONS IN THIS REGARD. INDIA DID NOT NOT FAVOUR DIRECT PARTICIPATION BY AMERICAN SCIENTISTS IN THE PROJECT. IT, HOWEVER, ALLOWED THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT TO SEND SOME SCIENTISTS TO INDIA AS OBSERVERS OF THE PROJECT. TWO AMERICAN SCIENTISTS WHO CAME TO INDIA IN THIS CONNECTION RECENTLY WENT AROUND VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY TO MAKE A STUDY OF HABITATS OF MONKEYS. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY THE US GOVERNMENT WAS ANXIOUS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT DESPITE THE FACT THAT INDIAN SCIENTISTS THEMSELVES WERE CAPABLE OF CONDUCTING THE SURVEY. ASKED TO COMMENT WHETHER THESE AMERICANS WERE ALLOWED TO GO TO THE BORDER AREAS IN THE NORTH IN PURSUIT OF MONKEYS, AN INFORMED INDIAN SCIENTIST

SAID: THERE ARE NO MONKEYS IN THE BORDER AREAS OF INDIA.

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6. THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT MADE CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS TO GET MR. DESAI'S DECISION TO BAN EXPORT OF MONKEYS REVERSED ON THE GROUND THAT IT WOULD HIT SERIOUSLY PRODUCTION OF ESSENTIAL DRUGS AND VACCINES IN THE WORLD. AMERICA ALSO SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF A SAFEGUARDS MECHANISM IN THE UNITED STATES TO PREVENT DIVERSION OF IMPORTED RHESUS MONKEYS FOR DEFENCE EXPERIMENTS. MR. DESAI, ACCORDING TO THE SOURCES, DECLINED TO RECONSIDER HIS EARLIER DECISION. MEANWHILE, THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) ALSO TRIED TO PERSUADE THE GOVERNMENT ON ACCEPTING SOME SAFEGUARDS MECHANISM AND ALLOWING SELECTED EXPORT OF MONKEYS FOR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH. WHO DIRECTOR GENERAL MAHLER DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO INDIA MET MR. DESAI AND TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO RELENT. THE HEALTH MINISTRY ALSO FAVOURED SOME RELAXATION ON THE BAN.

7. MR. DESAI FOLLOWED UP THE DECISION ON BAN OF EXPORT OF MONKEYS WITH ANOTHER TO PREVENT "UNNECESSARY ANIMAL
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EXPERIMENTATION," IN INDIA. FOLLOWING MR. DESAI'S INSTRUCTIONS, THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ICMR, DR. C. GOPALAN, SENT OUT A CIRCULAR TO MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTES ASKING THEM TO RESTRICT ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS TO "ONLY WHERE THERE IS A GENUINE AND IMPERATIVE NEED FOR SUCH EXPERIMENTATION". DR. GOPALAN, HOWEVER, CONCEDED IN THE LETTER THAT "ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS BECOME NECESSARY AND UNAVOIDABLE AT SOME STAGES". HE ADDED: "THE FACT THAT THESE EXPERIMENTS CAN PROVIDE INFORMATION AND RESULTS, WHICH COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE MITIGATION OF HUMAN SUFFERING IS ALSO REALISED". BUT, THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF UNNECESSARY ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION NOW BEING UNDERTAKEN FOR THE SAKE OF SATISFACTION OF CURIOSITY OR TO MERELY ACQUIRE SOME EXPERTISE. ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS WERE SOMETIMES UNDERTAKEN TO PROVE A POINT WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN WELL-ESTABLISHED IN HUMAN SITUATIONS. DR. GOPALAN ALSO SUGGESTED AVOIDANCE OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS IN THE MAINTENANCE AND HANDLING OF ANIMALS IN LABORATORIES.

8. DR. GOPALAN'S LETTER HAS ALREADY PROVOKED A CONTROVERSY AMONG MEDICAL RESEARCHERS AS TO THE DESIRABILITY OF ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS. IT WAS ARGUED BY SOME OF THEM THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DEMARCATE "NECESSARY" AND "UNNECESSARY" EXPERIMENTS BY MEDICAL STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS WHO USE ANIMALS AT VARIOUS STAGES. SOME SCIENTISTS SAY KILLING OF ANIMALS FOR EXPERIMENTS COULD BE CONSIDERABLY REDUCED BY SUBSTITUTING ANIMALS WITH TISSUE CULTURE FOR EXPERIMENTS. FOR INSTANCE, ONE ANIMAL COULD YIELD A LARGE NUMBER OF TISSUE CULTURE WHICH COULD BE USED FOR BIO-MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS. BUT LABORATORIES WOULD HAVE TO BE PROVIDED WITH SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES TO HANDLE TISSUE CULTURE. AT PRESENT, THE VIRUS RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT POONA HAS FACILITIES FOR PRODUCING TISSUE CULTURE. HOWEVER, TISSUE CULTURE COULD NOT BE AN ANSWER TO USE OF ANIMALS FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH HAS BEEN PROVED BY THE CRISIS FACED BY THE AMERICAN DRUG INDUSTRY IN THE ABSENCE OF RHESUS MONKEYS.
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9. AMERICA IS MAKING FRANTIC EFFORTS TO GET AS MANY RHESUS MONKEYS IT CAN FROM VARIOUS SOURCES. IT HAD RECENTLY ENTERED INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH BANGLADESH FOR SUPPLY OF THESE ANIMALS. BANGLADESH DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH OF THESE MONKEYS TO MEET AMERICAN REQUIREMENTS. BUT, IT IS REPORTED THAT LARGE NUMBER OF THESE MONKEYS ARE BEING SMUGGLED OUT OF INDIA TO BANGLADESH THROUGH THE INDO-BANGLA DESH BORDER. IT IS ALSO REPORTED THAT CLANDESTINE SHIPPING OF RHESUS MONKEYS REGULARLY TAKE PLACE NOW AT VARIOUS INDIAN PORTS. HOWEVER, THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT IS FACING A PROBLEM OF DISEASED ANIMALS CARRYING CERTAIN VIRUS INTO THE US THROUGH THE CLANDESTINE CHANNELS. THE SMUGGLING OUT OF RHESUS

MONKEYS AND CONSEQUENT LOSS OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE FOR INDIA IS
BEING POINTED OUT BY AMERICA IN RENEWED EFFORTS TO PERSUADE
INDIA TO RELAX THE BAN.

END TEXT.

10. COMMENT: WE ARE UNABLE TO IDENTIFY THE US OFFER TO SCREEN
MONKEYS FOR THE DETECTION OF DISEASES BEFORE EXPORT (PARA 4).
AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, US SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN PARTICIPATING
AS CONSULTANTS IN THE INDIAN PRIMATE SURVEY (PARA 5), AT THE
REQUEST OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. THIS
PARTICIPATION WAS COVERED BY AN "AGREED MINUTE" BETWEEN THE EMBASSY
(ACTING FOR THE INTERAGENCY PRIMATE STEERING COMMITTEE) AND
DST.

11. WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THE INFO IN PARA 11 ABOUT
DIRECTIVES HAVING GONE OUT FROM ICMR TO CUT BACK ON
"UNNECESSARY" ANIMAL RESEARCH, BUT HAVE FOUND THAT SCIENTISTS
WORKING IN AREAS THAT USE MONKEYS ARE NOT PARTICULARLY
CONCERNED ABOUT GOI RESTRICTIONS ON ANIMAL USE.

12. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION ON DISCUSSIONS OF THE
MONKEY BAN WITH THE INDIANS AT THE WHA (TO SUPPLEMENT WHAT WAS
REPORTED IN GENEVA 7857).

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Status: NATIVE
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